



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Washington DC 20420

July 18, 2019

In Reply Refer To: 001B
FOIA Request: 19-08160-F

Jasper Craven
MuckRock News
DEPT MR 74660
411A Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02144-2516
74660-32535423@requests.muckrock.com

Dear Mr. Craven:

This is the first interim Initial Agency Decision (IAD) to your June 3, 2019, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) FOIA Service. You requested a copy of "All partnership details – including copies of draft and final contracts and email communication between agency and private sector stakeholders for the recently inked partnerships with Janssen Pharmaceuticals/Johnson + Johnson for Spravato (detailed here: <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5220>) Records searched should be between Jan. 1, 2010 and present day. E-mail key words include: "MOU," "side effects," "spravato," "Wilkie," "Trump," "FDA." That same day, June 3, 2019, you modified the timeframe of your request to January 1, 2019 and present day.

On June 11, 2019, the VA FOIA Service acknowledged receipt of your request and advised that your request fell under the cognizance of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Your request was referred to and received by the VHA on June 11, 2019.

On June 21, 2019, the VHA acknowledged receipt of your request and advised that your request falls under the cognizance of the VA Office of the Secretary (OSVA). Your request was referred to and received by the OSVA on June 21, 2019. Please accept this as the OSVA's acknowledgment of receipt of your FOIA request and first interim IAD.

On July 12, 2019, we searched the VA Secretary's Center for Strategic Partnerships for "All partnership details regarding Spravato for the time frame of January 1, 2019 thru present date."

Our search located 879 pages of responsive records. Of those pages, I determined that 852 pages are releasable in their entirety and 27 pages are partially releasable pursuant to Title 5 U.S.C. § (b)(6), FOIA Exemption 6.

FOIA Exemption 6 exempts from disclosure of personnel or medical files and similar files the release of which would cause a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. This requires a balancing of the public's right to disclosure against the individual's right to privacy. The privacy interests of the individuals in the records you have requested outweigh any minimal public interest in disclosure of the information. Any private interest you may have in that information does not factor into the aforementioned balancing test. Specifically, the information being withheld, as indicated on the enclosed documents, under FOIA Exemption 6, consists of names; we however release the names and VA email addresses of VA Senior Executives. Federal

civilian employees and private citizens retain a significant privacy interest under certain circumstances, such as in instances where the release of their information could represent a threat to their well-being, harassment, or their ability to function within their sphere of employment. The federal civilian employees and private citizens whose information is at issue have a substantial privacy interest in their personal information. In weighing the private versus the public interest, except names and VA email addresses of VA Senior Executives, we find that there is no public interest in knowing the names, identities, email addresses, VA usernames, phone numbers, cellular numbers, and facsimile numbers of federal civilian employees and private citizens. The coverage of FOIA Exemption 6 is absolute unless the FOIA requester can demonstrate a countervailing public interest in the requested information by demonstrating that the individual is in a position to provide the requested information to members of the general public and that the information requested contributes significantly to the public's understanding of the activities of the Federal government. Additionally, the requester must demonstrate how the public's need to understand the information significantly outweighs the privacy interest of the person to whom the information pertains. Upon consideration of the records, I have not been able to identify a countervailing public interest of sufficient magnitude to outweigh the privacy interest of the individuals whose names are redacted. The protected information has been redacted and (b)(6) inserted. "Withholding a telephone number or e-mail address, alone, is not sufficient to protect that [privacy] interest; alternate means of contacting and harassing these employees would be readily discoverable on the Internet if this court ordered their names disclosed." Long v. Immigration & Customs Enf't, 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 160719 (D.C. Cir. 2017).

On July 17, 2019, I requested the VA Office of Information and Technology conduct a search of OSVA mailboxes for the portion of your request pertaining to email communication between agency and private sector stakeholders for the recently inked partnerships with Janssen Pharmaceuticals/Johnson + Johnson for Spravato. The timeframe of the search will be for January 1, 2019 thru present date. The key words will include: MOU, side effects, Spravato, Wilkie, Trump, and FDA.

The portion of your request pertaining to drafts and final contract falls under the cognizance of the National Acquisition Center (NAC). Your request has been referred to the NAC under FOIA tracking number **19-09541-F**. For questions regarding **19-09541-F** please contact Ms. Kristen Ellis of the NAC at the following:

National Acquisition Center
Attention: Ms. Kristen Ellis, FOIA
Business Resource Service
PO Box 76, Bldg 37
(003A4A)
Hines, IL 60141
Phone: (708) 786-7804
Facsimile: (708) 786-5148

FOIA Mediation

As part of the 2007 FOIA amendments, the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) was created to offer mediation services to resolve disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies as a non-exclusive alternative to litigation. Using OGIS services does not

Mr. Jasper Craven
Page 3
July 18, 2019

affect your right to pursue litigation. Under the provisions of the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, the following contact information is provided to assist FOIA requesters in resolving disputes:

VA Central Office FOIA Public Liaison:

Name: Doloras Johnson

Email Address: vacofoiaservice@va.gov

Office of Government Information Services (OGIS)

Email Address: ogis@nara.gov

Fax: 202-741-5769

Mailing address:

National Archives and Records Administration

8601 Adelphi Road

College Park, MD 20740-6001

FOIA Appeal

Please be advised that should you desire to do so, you may appeal the determination made in this response to:

Office of General Counsel (024)
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

If you should choose to file an appeal, please include a copy of this letter with your written appeal and clearly indicate the basis for your disagreement with the determination set forth in this response. Please be advised that in accordance with VA's implementing FOIA regulations at 38 C.F.R. § 1.559, your appeal must be postmarked no later than ninety (90) days of the date of this letter.

Sincerely,

Ruthann Parise
OSVA FOIA Officer

Enclosure: 879 pages redacted